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DEPARTMENT FOR S/ES-CR, S/ES-O, AF/W, AF
DEPARTMENT PASS PEACE CORPS
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BENIN: PRESIDENT YAYI'S CONDOLENCE MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT OBAMA PLEDGES JUSTICE FOR MURDERED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER AND BETTER PROTECTION FOR OTHER AMCITS

REF: (A) Cotonou 99, (B) Cotonou 90

¶1. This is an action message. Please see para 4.

¶2. Late evening on March 23, 2009, Post received a condolence message from President Boni Yayi to President Obama on the March 12 murder of Ms. Catherine Puzey, Peace Corps Volunteer, in the village of Badjoude. Yayi pledged to take all available measures to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators and to better protect Amcits living and working in Benin. He also requested that the USG express Benin's formal condolences to the family of Ms. Puzey.

¶3. Text of the Yayi/Obama letter follows:

Republic of Benin
Presidency of the Republic
The President

Cotonou, 23-03-09

Ref/No. 182-0/PR/CAB/SP

Mr. President:

It is with profound sadness that I received the news of the horrible and odious assassination Thursday, 12 March 2009, of Catherine Puzey, recently a Peace Corps Volunteer on mission in the Department of Donga in Benin.

This terrible crime to which an esteemed American citizen fell victim and that affects all the people of the United States of America is also a crime against the friendship between peoples. It impacts with equal violence the people of Benin and has caused general indignation.

During this particularly difficult time, I have the sad duty to present to Your Excellency and to all the people of the United States of America my sincere condolences as well as my regrets and those of the people of Benin who just lost a friend whose efforts for the most vulnerable, notably girls, leave an unforgettable memory.

I hope that you will forward these condolences to all the members of the deceased's family. Her sacrifice will not be in vain.

Please assure them that all available measures are in place to find the perpetrators of this odious act which will not go unpunished.

I take this opportunity to reiterate to you my commitment and that of the entire Government of Benin to work toward the consolidation of relations between our two countries and to assure you of a better protection of Americans living and working in Benin.

May God Almighty give peace and eternal rest to the soul of the deceased and give to her family and to the great people of the United States of America in mourning the courage and strength to overcome this tragedy.

Expressing again my sincere condolences and profound regret, I hope you will accept, Mr. President, heartfelt expression of my profound compassion and my very highest consideration.

Very sincerely,

Dr. Boni Yayi

¶4. Post offers the following text for consideration for an Obama/Yayi reply, noting the importance to this investigation of having the GOB request that the FBI lab in Quantico, VA, test the crime scene evidence and guarantee that the results will be admissible in Benin's courts:

Begin text:

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your condolences and assurances that everything is being done to apprehend and punish those responsible for the murder on March 12, 2009, of our precious Peace Corps Volunteer, Ms. Catherine Puzey, in the village of Badjoude, where she taught high school for eighteen months.

I will indeed forward your message to her family, noting that her and their sacrifice will not be in vain.

My government as well as the American people wish to express appreciation for the support of your government and people to our mission in Benin with the Government of Benin investigation. I understand that this includes your government's request for U.S. Government assistance with analysis of the crime scene evidence and guarantee that the results, from the FBI Laboratory in Quantico, Virginia, in this case, will be admissible in Benin's courts.

I appreciate also your assurances that Americans living and working in Benin will be better protected. We value our friendship with Benin and hope that it will be able to continue to grow.

End text.

BROWN